CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Military control was the essence of British rule. Indian soldiers not only created the Raj but also fought for its preservation. They were recruited on a voluntary basis and at no point did the British Government have to resort to conscription. As such, the Armed Forces of the Raj constituted the largest voluntary Force raised by a foreign power. Although it was the strongest pillar of imperialism, it was at the same time capable of conversion into a national army with the transfer of political power.¹

The Indian soldiers of the Raj were not mere mercenaries since they fought not only for monetary benefit but also for honour or izzat. The Government exploited the prevailing caste distinctions of the society and extolled the military virtues of certain classes. The myth of 'martial races' was also fostered as a ploy to divide and rule. As Jeffrey Greenhut has pointed out "The Martial Race theory had an elegant symmetry. Indians who were intelligent and educated were defined as cowards, while those defined as brave were uneducated and backward." This explained, "the British belief that only British gentlemen combined both the intelligence and courage for a man to

become an officer."^2

Until 1919 Indians were excluded from the officer cadre of the Armed Forces. With the growth of the Freedom Movement the entry of Indians in the officer cadre was inevitable. However, during the inter-war years, under the guise of 'Indianisation', the British had pursued a policy of segregation and institutionalised racism in the officer cadre of the Armed Forces. The 'Eight-Unit' Scheme had ensured that no Britisher would ever have to serve under an Indian officer. 'In these circumstances,' General D.K. Palit has observed 'could there have existed much comradership, fellow-feeling or professional loyalty between the two elements of the officer cadre of the same Army?'^3 The formation of the Indian National Army was the direct consequence of the policy of segregation and isolation of the Indian officers. Later, the Royal Indian Navy and the Air Force Mutinies were also the outcome of dissatisfaction with the prevailing service conditions.

In spite of growing discontent in the Indian officer cadre the Government had retained the overall control of the Armed Forces until the end


of the British Raj. The Armed Forces did not participate in the freedom struggle. The Indian political leaders, recognising the value of the apolitical tradition of the Armed Forces, did not seek to enlist their cooperation in the freedom struggle. In fact, when the RIN mutiny became serious, it was Sardar Patel who urged the mutineers to surrender unconditionally. Later, Mahatma Gandhi issued a statement which said 'they were thoughtless and ignorant if they believed that by their might they would deliver India from foreign domination.'

When the transfer of power appeared imminent, the Government attempted to preserve the unity of the Armed Forces to ensure Britain's imperial interest in the subcontinent. Mountbatten had been instructed by the British Prime Minister Attlee to convince the Indian leaders of the need to maintain the unity of the Army. Both the Congress and the Muslim League however had made it clear that the partition of the country would also involve the division of the Armed Forces. In spite of his earlier reluctance to divide the Armed Forces, on 25 April 1947, Mountbatten had allowed discussions in the Defence Committee on the future of the Indian Armed Forces. The Defence Committee had agreed that planning for the division of the Armed Forces was to be given precedence over their nationalisation. The issue of the division of

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the Armed Forces was discussed prior to an official announcement of the
decision to partition the country. As such, the meeting of 25 April had
prejudged the issue of partition of the country. However, by the end of April,
the political negotiations for the transfer of power had already envisaged the
partition of the country. Therefore, it was not surprising that Mountbatten
had allowed discussion in the Defence Committee on the issue of the division
of the Armed Forces. Although he accepted the inevitability of the division of
the Armed Forces, Mountbatten had hoped that the acceptance of Dominion
status by India and Pakistan and his subsequent appointment as the common
Governor General would ensure Britain’s overall control over the defence policy
of the two countries. He had envisaged a much wider role for the Joint
Defence Council which had been constituted for the division of the Armed
Forces. As early as 12 May, Nehru had made it clear to Mountbatten that the
role of the joint army councils would be limited to a speedy and equitable
division of the human and physical resources of the Army. Although
Mountbatten admitted that in view of the attitude of the Congress the Army
question would be ‘the most difficult issue in the transfer of power’, he did not


\footnote{See Document 405 in ibid, p. 763.}
forsake the idea of a Joint Defence Council with wide powers.⁷ In his letter to the King he admitted:

My original idea had been that the Council should continue in its existing form for at least another year - and I secretly hoped for ever. It could carry on under my chairmanship (if both sides so wished) until I left.... It was in my mind that its scope might indeed expand, to cover financial and economic matters also, and eventually External Affairs and Communications, which would mean the 'virtual accession' of the two Dominions to one another....⁸

As relation between India and Pakistan deteriorated over Kashmir, the Joint Defence Council could not be extended. With its closure, Britain failed to preserve its long term strategic interest in the region. Thus, both India and Pakistan's commitment to Commonwealth security could not be achieved.

The task of dividing the Armed Forces was unprecedented in the military history of the world. That it was accomplished without much difficulty was largely due to the efforts of senior British and Indian officers of the Armed Forces. Describing the task accomplished by his Headquarters Auchinleck in his letter to the Editor of The Fighting Forces wrote:

⁷ See Document 414 in ibid, p.781.

The reconstitution of the Navy and Air Force into two completely separate and self contained navies and air forces entailed a complete taking to pieces of the existing Services and a complete reposting of all ranks of each Service. In the Army the task was more complicated still, as many units, of mixed Hindu and Muslim composition, had to be torn apart and rebuilt into new units of one class or religion only.

In addition, all the arms, equipment and stores of all three Services, including warships, tanks, vehicles, aircraft, workshops and so on, had to be divided fairly and efficiently so that each of the six new Services should have a fair start in its new life.

This was the main task of the Supreme Commander's Headquarters and one probably unique in the history of organized navies, armies and air forces. That it was fully and faithfully accomplished in four short months at a time when feelings were running higher and higher and the gap between the two great religious communities was growing wider and wider, was, in my opinion and in that of others competent to judge, a truly remarkable achievement. It reflects, I think, the highest credit on the officers responsible for carrying it out, both Indian and British....

Notwithstanding his earlier opposition to any scheme to divide the Armed Forces, Auchinleck and his staff had done their best. The AFRC had worked in a spirit of cooperation. This was reflected in the fact that most of its recommendations were unanimous. The division of the units and personnel of the Armed Forces was accomplished without much difficulty.

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9 A copy of the letter is in Auchinleck Papers (John Rylands University Library, Manchester), File LXXXVII, MUL 1311.
The division of military stores was the most contentious issue. India has been accused of preventing a fair division of military stores. Pakistan claimed she had not received the requisite tonnage of military stores which were assigned to her. Tonnage in itself did not mean much as the Indian Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Roy Bucher has pointed out "...it is a pity that tonnage figures were ever allowed to creep into basic arguments. In reality they mean little. The Director of Ordnance Services, Pakistan agrees with me."\textsuperscript{10} Even after the Pakistan backed tribal aggression of Kashmir, India continued to supply to Pakistan its due share of military stores. As hostilities continued in Kashmir, India could not be expected to supply military stores which would have been be used against her. The war in Kashmir had absolved India of the responsibility to supply military stores to Pakistan.

It has been argued that Mountbatten's worst mistake was "not only to consent to splitting the Indian Army but also to insist on accelerating the process. The ideal would have been to retain the Army intact under Field Marshal Auchinleck for two years from Independence Day to assist the two

\textsuperscript{10} General Sir Roy Bucher to Sir Terence Shone, High Commissioner of the U.K. in India, in Bucher Papers (National Army Museum, London).

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Governments impartially in the maintenance of order. However, in view of the prevailing communal feelings any attempt to keep the Armed Forces intact was neither practical nor feasible. It was because of the threat of communalism that the Punjab Boundary Force had to be disbanded. Moreover, any attempt to delay the division of the Armed Forces would have resulted in a civil war. Lord Ismay in his interview with H.V. Hodson was not wrong when he said:

I feel no one has made enough of the very grave risk we ran with the Army. I don’t believe the Army would have stayed if we had hung on any longer. If the Army had gone wrong, if the Army had started shooting, there’s just no limit to what the casualties would have been. It would have been a holocaust which one just can’t imagine.

The soldiers had remained true to their military discipline. Although there was fear that they might take part in the communal strife, it never happened. When the civil and police authorities collapsed they helped in the evacuation of refugees. Many evacuee camps were run by the Army. The neutrality of the Armed Forces had made the transfer of power relatively smooth. As the communal violence increased the Armed Forces could not remain aloof for long.

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12 H.V. Hodson, n.8, pp.533-4.
Their rapid division was the best option. Once the decision to partition India was taken, the choice was between a chaotically disintegrating united Army or two more or less coherent separate forces.¹³

In India, even after the independence, the officer training schemes continued to emphasise the apolitical nature of the Army. The theory of civilian control of the military was the legacy of the British Indian Army. The introduction of New Pay Code shortly after independence reduced the emoluments in each officer scale of the Indian Army. Moreover the post of Commander-in-Chief was abolished and the President of India was designated as the Supreme Commander. These measures were taken to reduce the importance of the Army vis-a-vis the civil authority.

Indian political leaders were keen to maintain the discipline of the old Indian Army. This was reflected in Nehru's attitude towards the INA. He had welcomed the decision to withdraw trials of INA personnel and in his letter to Auchinleck wrote:

I suppose everyone who has given thought to the matter realize fully that it is dangerous and risky business to break the discipline of the army. It would obviously be harmful to do any injury to a fine instrument like the Indian Army, and yet at every step, till major changes take place converting it into a real national army, we have to face the political issue which governs

¹³ Philip Ziegler, n.11, p.465.
every aspect of Indian life today. Risks have to be taken
sometimes, more especially when existing conditions are felt to be
intolerable....14

In spite of his earlier sympathy, as Prime Minister, Nehru did not attempt to
absorb all ex-INA officers in the new Indian Army. Only those officers who
had not committed atrocities were offered re-employment. They, however, lost
seniority for the years spent in the INA. Some were absorbed in the IFS and
the ICS. By not absorbing all ex-INA men, the Government had tacitly
admitted that they had broken military discipline.

Unlike the Armed Forces in India, the apolitical tradition of the British
Indian Armed Forces did not last in Pakistan. The state of Pakistan was
created on the basis of a religion and the Armed Forces had to adhere to the
Islamic ideology. As such, it is not the officers but the general political climate
which is the final determinant of the role of the military.

For most British officers the division of the Armed Forces was the
beginning of an end. They saw it as the disintegration and dismemberment
of the old Indian Army. The division however did not destroy the old Indian
Army. In both India and Pakistan two highly professional Armies have
emerged. Mutual threat perceptions facilitated the rapid expansion of the

14Nehru to Auchinleck, 4 May 1946. Auchineleck Papers (John Rylands
University Library, Manchester), File LXX, MUL 149.
Armed Forces of the two countries. Yet the Armed Forces of the two countries have remained essentially different. As far as India is concerned, Stephen Cohen has rightly pointed out, 'De Tocqueville and other theorists argued that democracy and a large standing army were incompatible, but India has managed both'.